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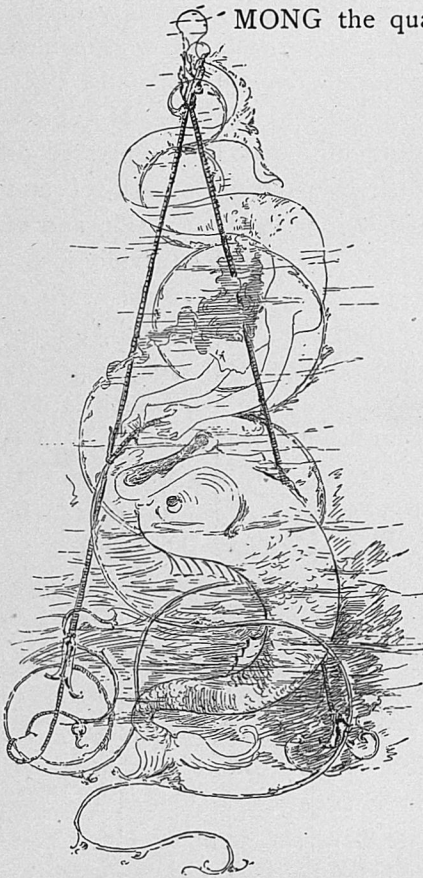
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# CORREGGIO.

## SECOND AND CONCLUDING ARTICLE.



DESIGNED BY MISS DORA WHEELER.

AMONG the qualities which go to form the sum of possible attraction in a work of art is that voice by which it indicates the spirit, the individuality, of its creator. This is a quality coincident, very often, with the highest general perfection, but which sometimes goes far to redeem an art in other ways deficient. It is not always present in the very noblest work,—it is unhinted at, perhaps, in the whole achievement of a great painter, while disclosed by the single hasty sketch of some less complete performer. Every painting reveals, of course, in some sense, the man who painted it,—tells us what he could do, what he preferred to see, and how, by instinct or by design, he chose to think and feel at the time he worked. Each picture telling thus of one moment and of one mood, all a man's work, collectively judged, must give us in some sense his life's average in these things. But I mean more than such testimony as this by the quality in question. There is more to be said of a man sometimes—not always, however, even of one who has followed a divine profession quite divinely—than that he saw, and felt, and thought, and did. There is such a thing as *being*, in a particularly individual way that imparts a flavor equally rare and consistent to everything seen, and felt, and thought, and done,—a flavor that is wanting to the work, whether plain-spoken or subtle, whether reckless or conscientious, of men differently endowed. The work of such may be as great, or greater, in the sum of its perfections; it yet lacks this one possible charm.

French writers occasionally use the word "temperament" in a way that very nearly expresses the quality I mean; only they apply it to things of the heart, while I would make it serve for things imaginative and artistic. It is not character, this quality; it is not strength, whether of mind, or wrist, or inner vision. It is not thoughts logical, self-searching, idealizing, or rapt. It is *temperament*, a sort of individual and peculiar atmosphere that pervades all sides of life, mental, moral, physical, emotional. It is a quality we recognize at once when we occasionally see it in our intercourse with men, difficult as it would be for us to put a finger on the special words or acts revealing it. Just as easily we recognize it in a work of art, equally hard though it might be to name the signs by which it shows. Is there not a personal voice that speaks to us when Lionardo paints, or Memling, when Michelangelo uses brush or chisel, when Rembrandt scratches a line, or Rubens lays a color, or Hals, or Dürer, or Gainsborough, or Turner,—a voice we do not hear from Titian even, or from Veronese, from Holbein or from Reynolds,

nay, not from Raphael himself? It is a voice that joins, it will be noted, names quite incongruous in all besides, and separates with a bold division methods and endowments otherwise quite similar. It is independent of all other gifts. It exists not in coherence of mood, or medium, or manner,—who is more various in all of these than Rembrandt? It does not take a wide cycle of work to reveal it,—who is so fragmentary as Lionardo? It lacks not through any imperfection we can note,—who is so perfect as Raphael, who so equably endowed as Titian? Nor can we say, on the other hand, that it exists *because* of some imperfection, some shadow or limitation in one direction which brings out other qualities in a peculiar and a clearer light. We cannot so believe when we think of Michelangelo. Less than anything, however, can this self-revealing be called deliberate, sought for, or self-conscious. No one could be more naïve than Memling, for example, no one more spontaneous than Franz Hals.

There are critics, it is true,—Mr. Ruskin in the more didactic of his various moods is a good example,—who seem to look upon this subtly and intangibly obtruded personality of the artist as a superfluity, if not an impertinence, in work that should entirely sink the workman in the things he renders—as humbly, docilely, and exactly as he may. But outside of the daily decreasing band of so-called “realists,” I shall scarcely provoke discussion if, taking M. Véron, for example, as the mouthpiece of an opposite theory, I claim with him that this expressed or suggested personality is the most valuable, perhaps, of all possible elements in a work of art; or, if not the most valuable, certainly the most fascinating. And the critic of one side and of the other will admit that in no painted work whatever is the quality I speak of so vividly incarnate, so enthrallingly pervasive, as in Correggio’s. The sole exception is, perhaps, the work of Lionardo; even Rembrandt’s must fall behind. I refer here, of course, to the strength, greater or less, not to the grade, higher or lower, of the quality discussed. Despite the unique perfection in which some other qualities are present on Correggio’s canvas, it is this one which strikes us first, which works on us most forcibly, and remains most permanently in our minds. It is this which makes his pictures so strongly loved or so positively disliked, according as the observer’s imagination sympathizes with the painter’s or protests against it. No student can be emotionally indifferent to Correggio, as he may to very many whose excellence he admires or critically denies. If we learn to love his pictures, we almost forget the conception, the idea, which is what we incessantly think of with Raphael. We do not dwell upon the inimitable rendering, as we do with Titian; nor do we rest at the simple ocular delight which so amply satisfies with Veronese. And on the other hand, the student who protests against Correggio must do it as Mr. Ruskin does,—acknowledging his pre-eminence in all these things. The power of a mighty painter speaks to us, indeed, from Correggio’s canvas; but it is almost out-voiced by the charm of an individual temperament, the glamour of an ideal world distinct from all idealities of other men,—a world into which Correggio alone was born, and to which none penetrate save when he swings the door. There is no personal influence, I have said, to vie with his in strength but that of Lionardo. And what with Lionardo remains to us only in the mystic smile of a dozen faces, remains with Correggio in a cycle of varied groups, each more magnificent than the other, and is illustrated by landscape, by skies and air, and by abounding drapery, as well as by humanity the most various and by themes the most diversely chosen. Through all, through every scene, and through every figure, and through every touch, there runs a unity of sentiment that is most remarkable; for it is, I repeat, a unity of *sentiment*, and not an identity of type and mood, such as we see, for instance, in Fra Angelico.

All of this, perhaps, has been said of Correggio many times before. Mr. Symonds, for one, has said it with great insistence.<sup>1</sup> He has been one of many to try to define in what consists the “Correggiosity of Correggio,”—an affected phrase, surely, but one that has been much used because, perhaps, no simpler one serves quite so well. He has amply emphasized the strength of this quality, though his florid periods do not, after all, define it more intelligibly

<sup>1</sup> *Sketches in Italy and Greece.*



than do the naïve phrases of Vasari, as when he says, for instance:—"Near them is a boy representing a little angel, with a book in his hand, who is smiling so naturally that all who look on him are moved to smile also; nor is there any one, however melancholy his temperament, who can behold him without feeling a sensation of pleasure." And Mr. Symonds certainly estimates the *grade* of this quality less justly than its strength,—less justly, because less highly, than Vasari estimates it. He does not go so far wrong, to be sure, as Mr. Ruskin, who calls the *Antiope* an example of the "highest seventh circle" in "that whole vast, false heaven of sensual passion full of nymphs, satyrs, graces, goddesses, and I know not what." Mr. Symonds says truly, that it would be ridiculous to accuse this painter of "conscious immorality, or of what is stigmatized as sensuality." But when he compares Correggio's treatment of sacred subjects with Rossini's treatment of solemn themes, and refers to the *Stabat Mater* in illustration, he surely underrates the painter, or praises the composer overmuch. He brings a differing accusation from Mr. Ruskin's, but one almost more fatal. Sensual art may be high art though defective art,—maimed and lowered more or less by its immorality. But art with the least dash of triviality cannot be high art of any kind or grade. Correggio's work is not solemn, or sacred, or profound in a moral way; but it never shows a trace of the frivolity, the somewhat meretricious glitter, the theatrical effectiveness, we find in Rossini when he treats religious themes. Correggio's figures are not divine; but, though mundane, they are never worldly. We can imagine a race of innocent, sensuous beings, not intellectual or holy, but never brutal, never disingenuous, never affected, never flippant,—radiant, joyous, conscienceless, sinless creatures, impossible creatures, we might think, had not Correggio seen and drawn them,—to whom his Madonnas might be divinities. We cannot imagine any beings of any kind who could accept as a litany Rossini's would-be holy strains. Where do we find a single note of Correggio's to match the *Quis est homo*, I will say, with its superficial, flashy sentiment, and its somewhat trivial treatment? Correggio's painting is too solid, too radiant, too healthy, too naïve in a sumptuous sort of way. If no odor of prayer and incense mingles with the lotos-perfume of his art, it has at least no smell of the footlights. And if its spirit is not of Heaven, and scarcely of Olympus, it is surely Arcadian-born,—which cannot be said of the spirit of the *Stabat Mater*, that brilliant, frivolous, self-conscious child of the Parisian boulevard.

But to return to our subject. Much as has been said about the vivid personality of Correggio's art, there is one aspect of it that has not, I think, been insisted on. Pictures that possess a charm similar to his do not always entirely explain the individuality of their author, but they may at least be expected to suggest it. They may proclaim it in trumpet tones, or they may only breathe of it so faintly that mystery adds its quota to the spell. They may speak clearly, they may only hint with vagueness; but we should scarcely expect them to confront us with a paradox that reads like falsehood, and that grows more strange the more we try to work it out. Yet this seems to be the case with Correggio.

Having imbued our minds with the idea of his isolation, having accustomed ourselves to think of him as the only man of his generation who was not of a school, either of thought or of *technique*,—having seen in his pictures the vivid record of a most individual personality,—we expect, very naturally, to find in those pictures a naïve, unadulterated transcript of himself, a correct and more or less legible record of his nature, a clearly crystallized deposit from the untroubled current of his life. But the case is actually very different. The life and its artistic product are so utterly in contrast, that, were we set, knowing the story of the painter, to pick out his canvases in Dresden or in Paris, they are perhaps the last save Rubens's that we should pitch upon. And, conversely, were we shown the pictures, and asked then to construct the man, what a different figure we should draw from that which reality presents! We do not need Vasari's romances to point the paradox,—do not need to imagine the painter avaricious, morbid, or in dire straits of poverty,—do not need to believe that he "could not even persuade himself that he knew anything satisfactorily respecting his art." If we make the best, not the



worst, we can of his life,—if we translate dubious Italian terms by the most cheerful English words available, if we picture his existence as merely uneventful, unambitious, passed in a gray monotony of constant work, away from all artistic inspiration, in the dulness of burgher days unbroken by such social brilliancy as shone on all the other great men of his time,—the contrast is striking enough with the art which he created, that art which Mr. Symonds calls a “dithyrambic ecstasy,” a “mood of sensuous joy” full of “innocent and radiant wantonness.” From such a career as Correggio’s we might look, I repeat, for almost any art save the art it offers. A sombre, epic grandeur such as Michelangelo’s; an introspective depth like Lionardo’s; a delight in landscape, lovely as with Claude, or stormy as with Salvator; a mysticism such as Fra Angelico’s; an almost brutal mood like Spagnoletto’s; Dürer’s intellectual and solemn work, or Rembrandt’s subtle, half-fantastic vision,—any one of these things we might expect from him sooner than the joyous, sensuous, unreflecting, irresponsible, mundane radiance he shows. And his *technique*, with its perfect balance, its many-sided, uneccentric power, is equally marvellous in a life so formed and so conducted.

This was not a case, remember, where fate refused the artist an existence that he craved, and would have sought if possible. The century was not one of casts, and grooves, and scanty opportunity. Correggio’s narrow, colorless life was chosen of desire, or submitted to from lack of will to break its feeble chain. Such desire and such infirmity are equally hard to reconcile with the color, light, and richness of his work,—with its forcible personality, its intense appreciation of the beauty of existence. Few artists ever worshipped pure beauty as Correggio did; not one ever approached it in so passionate a way, ever revealed it with such joyous strength. There are but four, perhaps, who have loved it equally with him,—Raphael, Titian, Veronese, and Rubens. Raphael’s type is more intellectually conceived, more calmly elaborated; there is never any *abandon*, any lack of conscious self-possession in his work. Titian’s love of beauty is more sober,—is deeper, quieter, and more dignified; Veronese’s is more stately, and at the same time more superficial. He loves stuffs and marble columns almost as much as fair humanity. Only Rubens can be said to approach Correggio in the completeness with which he is swayed—is possessed, so to speak—by his love of beauty. But even in Rubens it is less spontaneous; there is somewhat of conscious self-abandonment, and so of grossness, that we do not find in Correggio. Look at the *St. Catherine* at Paris. We could scarcely conceive, had not Correggio made it palpable for us, a mood of such radiant, overflowing joy, free from every accent of exaggeration, affectation, or triviality. Compare such pictures, now, with the life from which they sprang. The life, so far as we can judge,—and there is nothing to make us doubt the accuracy of our judgment,—was the simple outcome of the man’s own preference and feelings. The art, without possibility of mistake, is the absolute essence of a strong, consistent nature. Yet it is almost impossible to compare the two, and not think of the one or of the other as a deliberate masquerading. There have been ages when such a masquerade would not seem unlikely,—when a man with the sensuous, pleasure-loving, impassioned temperament we see revealed to us on our master’s canvas could have found an outlet for it in his art alone, when the outer world, by conscious or unconscious pressure, would have forced his life into a stricter or more hypocritical pathway. But there was little masquerading done in the Italian *cinque-cento*. Intellectual freedom was absolute, freedom of speech and conduct almost as unfettered. It was useless to deceive, since conformity to any standard was not looked for. The influence of the *Zeitgeist* to which I have referred did not tend to the choking of originality. It was not a dogmatism of fashion or opinion, not a limiting of character by any conventionalities of belief or practice, but a wide and intense appreciation of what each and every one might have to show. It was a hearty, sympathetic encouragement given to the developing of all gifts and of all sides of every character, for good and evil quite alike. The mass of culture and talent, of perceptive judgment and delicate sensibility, did not coerce into one required path, or bind with any exclusive canons, but rather, by its very readiness to applaud, lured

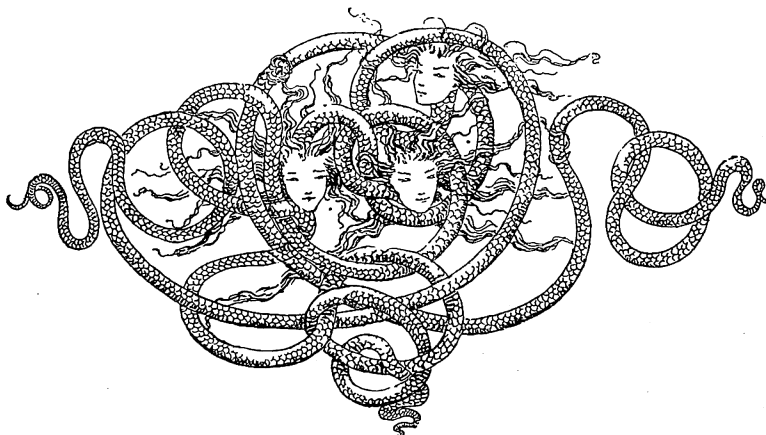
genius into many roads. The wide reach of artistic life throughout the length and breadth of Italy, man reacting on man for criticism and culture, for incitement and applause, not for restraint and dogmatizing, is, as I have said, the most marked feature of the time. Most artists tried many paths in art, since all were popular in the best sense of the word, and since they had inhaled with the very air a love for all and some aptitude for each. Therefore, while the great artistic personalities of the age were thoroughly genuine and self-expressive, yet between them all we see a certain similarity, as in each one's work a certain catholicity. The pictures of Correggio's generation were kept by the sound *artistic* conscience of the time within the bounds of the strictly legitimate in art. Painting was not degraded, as so often since, to the expression of ideas other than pictorial,—ideas literary, moral, or dramatic. Yet we see at a glance that its limits were wide; artistic expression of no sort was excluded. There were no rules for subject or treatment save such as any man who was artist-born would by nature mark out for himself. So there was no temptation for a painter to make his pictures conform to a stricter code than that of his own life. Nor, conversely, was there anything in public opinion to bid him make his life more reserved or more ascetic than the things he chose to paint. That sensuous side of the Renaissance which Correggio chose to interpret—or rather, such is the force and frankness and consistency of his brush, which he seems to have interpreted by the power of some demoniac possession—was not its only side. It had a purely mental side as well, which is disclosed, for example, by much of Raphael's work, and a fiercely moral side, which Michelangelo suggests. The people that accepted these, and that lauded the intellectual subtleties of Lionardo, would have accepted Correggio's art had it been as gray and sombre and severe as we find his living to have been. And the people that accepted and applauded all bold, consistent lives,—Vittorio da Feltre's, and Federigo of Urbino's, and Michelangelo's, and Benvenuto's, and Cesar Borgia's (good or evil, it was all one),—would not have blamed Correggio had the life he lived been of the same sort with the dreams he dreamed. Individual growth was in everything encouraged. In Correggio it seems to have taken place, unpruned, ungrafted, uncontrolled, in his personal existence no less than in the work he did. And yet the work does not express the life,—the fruit seems foreign to the root.

And not only foreign, let me insist, but in utter contradiction. In all the history of the epoch there is no man, whatever his profession, whose life seems so untypical of his time,—so far removed from all the pagan, spontaneous, naïve, sensuous, yet intellectual, beauty-loving, and knowledge-seeking tastes that mark this age, in contrast with those before and after. In all the art of the Middle Renaissance, on the other hand, there is none that so incarnates some of these things as does Correggio's. He is as typical of the middle bloom of Renaissance art as is Botticelli of its earlier, and Bernini of its later flowering. It is not the tentative, hesitating, half-pagan, half-mystic work of Botticelli, who is conscious of the conflict waging between the mediæval and the pagan world, their influences and their traditions,—who loves them both, but does not fully surrender himself to either, or blend them into a novel whole. Still less is it the impure, attitudinizing, *blasé*, overblown art Bernini practised when the Renaissance was dying too,—was growing as effete as the paganism and the mediævalism which had gone before, and the apparently dry bones of which had given it birth. The key-note of Correggio's art is a vivid, active delight in the very fact of being. The children of his brush do not need to think or know; existence is enough for them, for existence means endless joy and laughter. And so his art is typical of the superb, rounded, self-confident, full-grown Italian life, when all its long-inherited and its new-found influences had been assimilated, and before the vital energy they produced had begun to fail. It is the very essence of this life, seen, as I have said, from its sensuous, not from its intellectual side. And it is especially valuable to students of history, for the reason that, giving this sensuous side without any support from higher things, it enables him to judge it with great clearness. We learn from Correggio—or we might learn if we would—that the sensuousness of the Renaissance, wide and deep though it was, irresponsible

and unmoral as it frankly professed itself to be, was yet a very different thing from the sensual depravity of an Asian court, or of Rome in her decadent days. The key-note that is struck through all the wide variations of Correggio's themes—from the Passion of Christ to the amours of Jupiter—must show us this. His satyr is not coarse, if his Christ-Child is not divine. Antiope, Leda, Io, Danae, are not brutalized, are not consciously transgressing; they are simply natural, and joyful, and unreflecting,—living only for the day and its delights. And the frank earthliness of his Madonnas is a scarcely distinguishable nature from their own, though pictured in a soberer mood. In Correggio's Madonnas is struck the lowest note in that long scale where the highest is sounded by the holy presence of the Dresden *Sistina*. Not, I mean, the lowest possible, or the lowest that has actually been struck, but the lowest compatible with *artistic* harmony between idea and execution. Correggio's Madonnas are not, as some have been, Bacchantes, or Phrynes, or rude Italian peasant-girls; but they are the most simply and sensuously and radiantly earthly of all Madonnas,—the most mundane, not after the manner of our tired, self-conscious modern world to-day, but after the childlike manner of the modern world triumphing in its new birth and its just-learned powers. Correggio's mothers are as far below the divinity of Raphael's conceptions, as his heathen heroines are far above the conscious sensuality we find in those of Giulio Romano and of more modern artists whom we do not need to name.

These, then, are the two things to be noticed in a study of Correggio,—not, perhaps, by the critic properly so called, but surely by him who cares to study human nature, and who holds, as of necessity he must, that its artistic phases are among its subtlest, strangest, and most fascinating. First, we should notice his isolation, his separateness from any contemporary school, his position outside the great circles of artistic influence. And this amid a race of artists born, in the very heyday of art, in the very hot-bed of rivalry and restlessness and universal curiosity. Secondly, we should notice the divergence, wide as pole from pole, of the man and the artist, the essential contrast in which his birth, breeding, character, surroundings, physical existence, and mental atmosphere seem to stand to their artistic outcome. And this in an age of unrestricted self-expression. And we should remember, moreover, how the conjunction of these two things intensifies their strangeness,—the man in whom we find the first, the isolated lot, being the very one in whom we should least expect to find the second, the divergent life and work.

M. G. VAN RENSSELAER.



DESIGNED FOR THE AMERICAN ART REVIEW BY MISS DORA WHEELER.